

Lesson: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas)*

Kindergarten Through Grade Three

Time

20–40 minutes

Materials

Brown v. Board of Education poster

Writing instruments

Paper

Vocabulary

citizen

court decision

equal

judge

lawyers

ruling

segregation

separate

Supreme Court

testify

versus

Note: Consider using a word wall or graphic organizers to prompt students' thoughts.

Content standards addressed: History–Social Science Standards Kindergarten

- K.1.2 Learn examples of honesty, courage, determination, individual responsibility, and patriotism in American and world history from stories and folklore.
- K.6 Students understand that history relates to events, people, and places of other times.
 - K.6.1 Identify the purposes of, and the people and events honored in, commemorative holidays, including the human struggles that were the basis for the events (e.g., Thanksgiving, Independence Day, Washington's and Lincoln's Birthdays, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day).
 - K.6.3 Understand how people lived in earlier times and how their lives would be different today (e.g., getting water from a well, growing food, making clothing, having fun, forming organizations, living by rules and laws).

Grade One

- 1.4.1 Examine the structure of schools and communities in the past.
- 1.4.3 Recognize similarities and differences of earlier generations in such areas as work (inside and outside the home), dress, manners, stories, games, and festivals, drawing from biographies, oral histories, and folklore.

- 1.5.1 Recognize the ways in which they are all part of the same community, sharing principles, goals, and traditions despite their varied ancestry; the forms of diversity in their school and community; and the benefits and challenges of a diverse population.

Grade Two

- 2.3 Students explain governmental institutions and practices in the United States and other countries.
 - 2.3.1 Explain how the United States and other countries make laws, carry out laws, determine whether laws have been violated, and punish wrongdoers.
- 2.5 Students understand the importance of individual actions and character and explain how heroes from long ago and the recent past have made a difference in others' lives (e.g., from biographies of Abraham Lincoln, Louis Pasteur, Sitting Bull, George Washington Carver, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, Golda Meir, Jackie Robinson, Sally Ride).

Grade Three

- 3.4.1 Determine the reasons for rules, laws, and the U.S. Constitution; the role of citizenship in the promotion of rules and laws; and the consequences for people who violate rules and laws.
- 3.4.2 Discuss the importance of public virtue and the role of citizens, including how to participate in a classroom, in the community, and in civic life.
- 3.4.3 Know the histories of important local and national landmarks, symbols, and essential documents that create a sense of community among citizens and exemplify cherished ideals (e.g., the U.S. Flag, the bald eagle, the Statue of Liberty, the U.S. Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Capitol).
- 3.3.6 Describe the lives of American heroes who took risks to secure our freedoms (e.g., Anne Hutchinson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr.).

Starting the lesson

1. Hang the *Brown v. Board of Education* poster on the wall and have students complete one or all of the following tasks:
 - Discuss what they see and why they think it is important (K–3)
 - Write about what they see (quick write) (1–2)
 - Pair/share (K–3)
2. Read the story of *Brown v. Board of Education*. (See “A Famous Child” noted below.)

Activities

Role-play, discuss, or write about the following topics:

- The courtroom scenario
- Linda Brown's walk from home to school before the ruling and after the ruling
- How different school would be today if children were still attending segregated schools
- How the students would feel if schools were still segregated

Expected learning outcomes

1. Students will be able to share with others their knowledge of the court case *Brown v. Board of Education*.
2. Students will be able to discuss why *Brown v. Board of Education* was an important case.
3. Students will be able to discuss the effects the case has had on public education.

A Famous Child

This is a true story about a little girl named Linda Brown. She lived with her dad, mom, and two younger sisters in Topeka, Kansas. She attended Monroe Elementary School. To get to school, Linda would walk between the train tracks that went through a railroad-switching yard, which was a dangerous place for children to be walking. When she reached the bus stop, she often had to wait about 30 minutes in the cold or rain for the bus to take her the next 21 blocks to school.

One day her father took her to a different school, called Sumner Elementary School. It was much closer to their house, and her father wanted to enroll her there. The principal told her dad that Linda could not come to Sumner Elementary because only white students were allowed to attend, and Linda was black. Linda's dad was very hurt and didn't think that this was fair to Linda or any other black child.

There was an organization called the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This group fought for equal rights for black people. Linda's dad decided to go to the NAACP for help to get Linda enrolled at Sumner.

The law at that time said it was OK for black students not to attend the same schools as white students. The law said that if the schools were equal, then it was fair for black children and white children to attend separate schools. Linda's dad did not agree that the schools were equal for his daughter, and he agreed to fight for the law to be changed. He and others felt that because the children were separated, the schools were not equal. Linda's dad and the people working with the NAACP all believed that separating children could make them think they were different from one another. They also argued that black children and white

children playing and learning together could help them be able to work well together when they grew up.

Many people did not want to change the schools. Some people were afraid of change, and some people were prejudiced. They did not want all the children to go to the same school, even if the school was closer to their homes. The black lawyers from the NAACP decided to go to court to change the law that said “separate but equal” is fine for schools. A famous black lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, decided with a group of other black lawyers to fight against segregation, or the separation of black children and white children.

The case that the lawyers took to court was named *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. It was named “Brown” after the Brown family, but the case included the stories of four other black children who could not enroll in their neighborhood school because of their color. On May 17, 1954, almost a year later, the Supreme Court justices ruled that separate is not equal and that children of all races should be allowed to go to school together.

This ruling changed schooling for all children. Now it was OK not only for Linda Brown to attend Sumner Elementary but also for all children in the United States to attend the school closest to their home. Today black teachers and white teachers work together at the same schools and children from various backgrounds and cultures get to know one another in school and learn together. The belief is that if children learn together at school, they will work well together as adults.

Note: This story is adapted by permission from the magazine *Update on Law-Related Education* (Winter 1990).